

# Confucian Value on Rites and Music in Wei Dynasty

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**Abstract**—The culture in the Wei Dynasty inherited the trend of “taking sadness as beauty” in the music at the end of Han Dynasty, and flourished under the promotion of the government. In the turbulent era of Wei Dynasty, the official culture showed a serious deviation from the Confucian value on rites and music. From the perspective of the relationship between rites and music and ethical society, it cannot be ignored that this is also an important reason for the rapid decline of the regime.

**Keywords**—Wei Dynasty; music concept; Confucian value

## I. INTRODUCTION

Although Wei dynasty was in a turbulent period in politics, it was an era with unique style and large quantity of art works in history. In many ways, the culture of Wei Dynasty inherited the ethos of the late Han Dynasty, and generated more changes than that of the late Han Dynasty. Although the Han Dynasty adopted the method of “Huang Lao” in politics, it established the system of rites and music faithful to the Confucian thought of rites and music in national system. In the end of the Han Dynasty, when the political power was in decline, under the love and promotion of emperors in Wei Dynasty, the existing trend of taking sadness as beauty continued to be carried forward freely in the aspect of music. Compared with the Han Dynasty, this phenomenon is clearly different from the traditional Confucianism.

## II. SADNESS BEAUTY AT THE END OF HAN DYNASTY

Liu Bang, a native of Chu, respected the music of Chu state. He used Chu music in some occasions and incorporated the music of Chu state into the Yuefu of Han Dynasty. According to “Book of Han · Rites and Music”, Emperor Gaozu of Han Dynasty liked Chu music, so there were many Chu songs in “Fangzhong Music”. In the second year of Xiaohui (201 BC), he ordered Xia Houkuan, the head of Yuefu Bureau, to arrange them with flute, wind instrument and other musical instruments, and renamed as “Anshi Music”. Chu Music has an obvious style of sadness, and Liu Bang’s “Songs in Anshi Fang”, compiled by Yuefu Bureau, should be no exception. Li Yannian, the leader of Yuefu Bureau in the Western Han Dynasty, was born with gift for music, and loved singing and dancing (“Waiqi Zhuan · Empress Xiaowu · Book of Han”, Volume 97). “Every time he created new songs, all listeners were touched.” The traditional elegy “Xielu” and “Haoli” were adapted and collected in Yufu poetry, as the music used in the funeral ceremony. However, in the Eastern Han Dynasty, “Xielu” and “Haoli” appeared to

be played and sung as entertainment in the banquet because their sad lyrics could deeply move people. “Book of Later Han · Biography of Zhou Ju” records: on March 3 of the 6th year, Liang Shang held a grand banquet beside Luoshui River. Zhou Ju was sick at that time and didn’t attend the banquet. They drank and enjoyed music freely and intimately. At the end, they continued to sing the elegy “Xielu”. Everyone in the audience wept. The eunuch Zhang Zhong was also present, and told Zhou Ju about it after the party. Zhou Ju sighed and said, “that is what is called inappropriate sad music. It’s not a good thing. Disaster is coming! Finally Liang Shang died in autumn.” March 3rd was a day for “Fuxi”. The folk custom of “Fuxi” was originally relaxed and peaceful. Most scholars made banquets and improvised poems outside the folk custom ceremony on that day. The elegy was sung casually at the banquet which should be elegant and easy. This kind of untimely behavior was hard to be accepted by the people at that time. Zhou Ju’s judgment on this matter is that “inappropriate sad music bring bad luck”. After that, as expected, the banquet host soon died, confirming Zhou Ju’s judgment. In terms of this sad music, “Book of Rites · Music” records: all music comes from the heart. People’s emotions are moved in their hearts, so they are expressed in their voices, which are structured as music. Therefore, in a peaceful world, its music is stable and harmonious, and its politics is also peaceful; in turbulent times, its music is full of resentment and anger, and its politics is fallacious; in the music of subjugation, its people are embarrassed. The principle of voice and politics are conjectured. In “Book of Rites · Music”, the main Confucian concept on music holds that music is the real reaction of people’s hearts. Based on the characteristics of music, this kind of reaction is impossible to avoid. Different music will also affect people’s hearts in the slightest. The change of people’s mind leads to the change of people’s behavior. Therefore, if a country is popular in listening to and singing sad music, it will have a corresponding impact on people’s hearts. Then people’s behavior and the country’s political outlook will develop towards this trend of decline, and the result will soon be the subjugation of the country.

## III. SAD BEAUTY FASHION IN WEI DYNASTY

However, in the Wei and Jin Dynasty, more and more people liked to sing elegy outside the funeral, and the accompanying opposition was far less strong than in the Han Dynasty. For one thing, the continuous wars, pestilence and other natural and man-made disasters have brought too many deaths of life. The frequent performance of death makes the

people's mood need to be expressed with sad music. For the other thing, the cultural policy of the official upper class not only did not prohibit the sad music, but also became more open fashion due to the preferences of the princes and ministers. In many ways, Wei dynasty adopted the methods of Legalist school, but beside the Confucian value on culture and art, there was no systematic rule to follow. Cao Cao and his sons didn't want to tie themselves with rules. Their own preferences became the rules leading the cultural fashion.

Cao Cao and his sons were very fond of music, and had quite high attainments in music. Cao Cao once assisted the musicians and Chai Yu in determining the pitch of the bronze bell. "Sanguo Huiyao ·History of Wei Dynasty" records:

In the early years of Huangchu, the music bureau asked musician officials, Du Kui and Chai Yu, to determine the pitch of bronze bell. But finally Cao Cao determined it by his familiarity with music. Later, Du Kui, who insisted on the principle of elegant music, was not accepted by Cao Pi. At last, he was depressed and died. But Chai Yu and other musicians who conformed to Cao Pi's preference for praising folk music were greatly favored by Cao Pi.

Cao Cao himself loved and was proficient in music. According to "Records of the Three Kingdoms", "Cao Cao was fond of music and spent a lot of time on it." "Sanguo Huiyao" records: "he made new poems, which were orchestrated and became movements". He often participated in the production and performance of Yuefu Poems. Songs and poems, written by Cao Cao and his sons, were mostly beautiful Qingshang music, such as "Xianghe" and "Dan'ge". On this point, there are many records in the literature.

"Qingshang" actually was the collection of songs and poems, wrote by the three ancestors of the Wei family in Bronze Sparrow Terrace.<sup>1</sup> "Book of Song ·Music"

"Xianghe" was an old song of Han Dynasty. Accompanied by traditional stringed and woodwind instruments, it was a song of strength of character. Firstly, it had only one volume. But Emperor Ming of Wei State divided it into two volumes to take turn for night performance. There were 17 songs, including Zhusheng, Songshi and Liehe. After compound, there were 13 songs.

"Dan'ge" had four parts, coming from the Han Dynasty. With no accompany of stringed instruments, one singer sung it and three accompanies joined in the chorus. Emperor Wu of Wei State was quite good at singing this song. At that time there was a man called Song Ronghua, who was an expert in singing this song. He could sing it quite well.<sup>2</sup> "Book of Jin ·Music"

During the short period of the establishment of the regime in Wei Dynasty, the emperor continued his own music preference taking sadness as beauty, and did not construct the national cultural superstructure from a high position according to the Confucian thought of rites and music. Cao Cao's creation of Yuefu Poetry was not based on the Confucian

theory of music, but on his own preferences. Compared with his father, Cao Pi had the promotion of folk music in the extremely. He presided over a large number of banquets and drunk with the companion of sad music in the banquets. The audience also liked to appreciate this style of music.

Cao Pi's Yuefu poem "Shan Zhai Xing" records: "the sad stringed instruments were used to play the new songs, and the flute gave out the sad Qingshang music. The companion of musical instruments and singing deeply touched people's hearts, and the audience were very happy to hear them. The dancers of Qi were dancing the eastern dances, and the zither of Qin was playing western music. Guests from the South played the music for me." Here, the new songs and eastern dances are all folk music. The zither playing western music and the Qin coming from the south are all giving the music with sadness. And those who listen to the music were "all happy" with the sad music. In many poems created in Wei Dynasty, the music taking sadness as beauty is highly praised, and there was no longer any scruple about the Confucian concept of "the voice of subjugation" in Han Dynasty. For example,

Sitting side by side under the high pavilion, the host invited all the guests to enjoy the song and dance. Stringed instruments and singing gave out sad music with the wind, playing sad tunes of Yuzhengshang. (Cao Pi's "Summer Poetry")

The lingering sound had a rapid rhythm, and the sad voice excited each other. (Cao Pi's "Yuqiao Zuoshi")

All the mourners sing melody songs, and the musicians play Sheng and Yu. (Cao Pi's "Poem of Mengjin")

The zither of Qin was desolate, and the Se (a twenty-five-stringed plucked instrument) of Qi was sad and tender. The dancers danced wonderfully. Luoyang produced famous singers. (Cao Zhi's "Yetian Huangque Xing")

Based on the above situation, Liu Xie evaluated Cao's creation of Yuefu Poetry in "Wenxindiaolong ·No.7 Yuefu":

As for Cao Cao and his two sons in Wei Dynasty, they were brave and talented. They have changed the lyrics and tunes, and made new music. Seen from their Yuefu works such as "Beishang" and "Autumn Wind", some of them described banquets, some of them were sentimental about the military war. Their aspirations were not separated from turbulence, and their words were not separated from sadness. Although they used orthodox music, they were actually folk music.

Zheng Qu is the music of Zheng State. The music of Zheng is also known as Voice of Zheng Wei and decadent voice. Its biggest characteristic is that the melody is particularly pleasant, so it can stimulate people's desire through the wonderful music, and make people indulge in it. This is a kind of music that completely violates the standard of harmony and peace according to Confucian value on rites and music. Liu Xie here commented on the creation of Yuefu poems by Cao Cao and his sons, saying that they have the talent and courage to change and create the lyrics and tunes of Yuefu poems on their own preference. As emperors, they

<sup>1</sup> "Book of Song ·Music", Vol. 19, quoted Wang Sengqian's discussion on the three tones of Qingshang music

<sup>2</sup> Fang Xuanling et. al. "Book of Jin ·Music", No. 13, Part II

should have taken the Confucian traditional elegant music as the authentic, but their content, in the sense of ambition, took generous turbulence and various kinds of mourning as the beauty, following the style of Zheng music like “Shao” and “Xia”, which has lost “tender and gentle” tradition. It can be said that Liu Xie's evaluation on them is very pertinent.

Cao Pi created a large number of poems with the theme of thinking fondly of the beloved and Yuefu poems with the theme of sad emotion. He also showed no scruples about the pursuit of sad music in real life. He was very fond of folk singers who was good at singing elegy, and once made his officials seek them everywhere. In “To Prince Wei”, Fan Qin described a folk singer named Xuefang Chezi, who was a foreign sad song singer searched by the order of Cao Pi. She was infatuated and enthusiastic about sad music. It can be seen from Fan Qin's heartfelt praise:

Cao Pi asked his men to search for good singers all around. A singer, called Xuefang Chezi, was found, and she was fourth at that time. She could sing like nomad flute. All people were amazed about her voice that the heaven has given her. The breath flew in her chest. The sad melody flew out. The high pitch was not jarring, and the low voice was not weak. The sad voice felt like the sound of nomad flute, which was much better than general tunes.

The voice of nomad flute is sad. The singing of Xuefang Chezi listened like the sadness of nomad flute. “The sad melody flew out. The high pitch was not jarring, and the low voice is not weak. The sad voice felt like the sound of nomad flute, which was much better than general tunes.” From the evaluation, it can be seen it was a time when people were looking for the ultimate in sad music experiences.

Cao Pi himself seemed to be more interested in another girl, Suo from Wang Sun's family, who was good at singing sad songs, and intended to take her as his assistant wife.

There was a girl named Suo from the family of Wang Sun. She was nine years old. She dreamed meeting a god, and she could sing sad songs after waking up. Her voice was such touched. Later, she dressed up and changed her style to sing Qing tunes, such as “White Snow”. With a sharp voice, there was a rapid rhythm. Her voice could vibrate the leaves and birds sung together with her. While they were singing, the mist in the sky turned to frost. It was quite harmonious. Her voice was melodious with the companion of instruments and the nature. It was like the music of “Shao” and “Huo”, and also included the melody of Zheng State and Wei State.<sup>3</sup>

Suo's sad voice was different from Xuefang Chezi's soft sad voice, which was quite sharp sadness. “Solitary voice”, “sad voice” and “Shang style” were all sad music styles that were absolutely taboo by Confucian value on rites and music, which could also be said to be the extreme of the voice of subjugation. However, Cao Pi was fond of it. He thought that this kind of music could “include music of Zheng and Wei”,

and “contain Shao and Huo” at the same time, which seemed to be a test of its supreme political and cultural power.

It can be seen that Cao Pi adopted all sadness music and the music of Zheng and Wei which were always taboo according to Confucianism, and was very enthusiastic about it. The result of this situation is that “the music of Zheng and Wei is the music of subjugation. The sadness music is the music of subjugation. With such music, the politics of that country will be lax and the people will be drifting. The whole fashion of society will be bad”, just like recorded in “Book of Rites · Music”. To some extent, Cao Pi's behavior of collecting sad music also continued the pragmatism style when Cao Cao snared talents.

#### IV. THE AVOIDANCE OF THE SADNESS BEAUTY IN CONFUCIAN VALUE ON MUSIC

Music is “unavoidable in normal human feelings”, and has a profound sense of power to the human heart. Therefore, Confucian sages pay great attention to using music to improve the society: “music is a kind of thing that saints like to use. It can make people's heart good and change folk and customs, so the former king established it as an educational use (“Book of Rites · Music”). The music and rites made by saints according to the Heaven can arouse the positive goodness in people's hearts, and the level of sense is very deep. In this way, rites and music can change customs, so Confucianism has always attached great importance to the educational function of rites and music. Rites and music directly have a positive impact on people's hearts and minds. “The former king was very careful about things that could induce human behavior. Therefore, rites are used to guide people's minds, music is used to harmonize the atmosphere, decrees are used to regulate people's behaviors, and punishments are used to prevent and control adulterous behaviors.” The implementation of rites is combined with music. Rites define the content of education with various languages and rules, while music edifies people's temperament with spiritual nourishment. The combination of the two plays a role in preventing illegal behaviors in society. Therefore, the ritual music and administrative means are essentially the same, both for the sake of the stability of the people, political prosperity, and social harmony. Traditional music theory emphasizes the good edifying effect of peaceful and moderate music on people's mind, so it can reduce the foreign things that can arouse people's chaotic desire from the source, and then reduce people's chance to pursue endless desire, so as to realize the stability of social order. “Book of Rites · Music” records: “all music comes from the heart. When people's emotions are aroused in their hearts, they appear in their voices. The arrangement and combination of voices is called music. Therefore, the music of the peaceful dynasty is quiet and happy, and its politics is peaceful; the music of the troubled times is sad and angry, and its politics is perverse; the music of the subjugated country is sad, and its people are much embarrassed. The theory of music is quite same as the theory of politics. Peaceful and elegant music nurtures the people's mind of a peaceful and prosperous time, while sad music nurtures the people's mind of the troubled times. The voice comes from the heart, and the music type advocated by

<sup>3</sup> Cao Pi. *Dafan Qinshu*. [Qing] Edited by Yan Kejun. Collection of Three Ancient Dynasties, Qin, Han, Three Kingdoms and Six Dynasties · Three Kingdoms. Vol. 7, Zhonghua Book Company, P 1088, 1958.

the upper class can actually guide the hearts of the people. Sad music has always been regarded as the voice of subjugation in Confucianism and not advocated.

#### V. CONCLUSION

In fact, the short-term regime of Cao Wei didn't break away from the turbulent social environment. The cultural structure of Cao Wei regime made it difficult to transform to Confucian governance at that time. The Confucian lesson of "the voice of a dying nation is full of sorrow and melancholy" was completely thrown away. The indulgence in music form, the loss of all standards in music form, just for pleasure, were totally contrary to the traditional Confucian value on music. The lack of moderation in art and culture will inevitably lead to the confusion of people and society, and the Cao Wei regime finally ended with a short life.

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